

THE EXCURSION ¹

By EDWINA STANTON BABCOCK

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MRS. TUTTLE arrived breathless, bearing a large gilt parrot-cage. She swept up the gangway of the *Fall of Rome* and was enthusiastically received. There were, however, concealed titterings and suppressed whispers. "My sakes! She's went and brought that bird."

"I won't believe it till I see it."

"There he sets in his gold coop."

Mrs. Tuttle brought Romeo to the excursion with the same assurance that a woman of another stamp brings her Pekingese dog to a restaurant table. While the *Fall of Rome* sounded a warning whistle, and hawsers were loosed she adjusted her veil and took cognizance of fellow passengers.

In spite of wealth and "owning her own automobile," Mrs. Tuttle's fetish was democratic popularity. She greeted one after another.

"How do, Mis' Bridge, and Mister, too! Who's keeping store while you're away?"

"Carrie Turpin! You here? Where's Si? Couldn't come? Now that's too bad!" After a long stare, "You're some fleshier, ain't you, Carrie?"

A large woman in a tan-colored linen duster came slowly down the deck, a camp-stool in either hand. Her portly advance was intercepted by Mrs. Tuttle.

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"Mis' Tinneray! Same as ever!"

Mrs. Tinneray dropped the camp-stools and adjusted her smoked glasses; she gave a start and the two ladies embraced.

Mrs. Tuttle said that "it beat all," and Mrs. Tinneray said "she never!"

Mrs. Tuttle, emerged from the embrace, re-adjusting her hat with many-ringed fingers, inquiring, "How's the folks?"

Up lumbered Mr. Tinneray, a large man with a chuckle and pale eyes, who was introduced by the well-known formula, "Mis' Tuttle, Mr. Tinneray, Mr. Tinneray, Mis' Tuttle."

The Tinnerays said, "So you brought the bird along, hey?" Then, without warning, all conversation ceased. The *Fall of Rome*, steaming slowly away from the pier, whistled a sodden whistle, the flags flapped, every one realized that the excursion had really begun.

This excursion was one of the frank displays of human hopes, yearnings, and vanities, that sometimes take place on steamboats. Feathers had a hectic brilliancy that proved secret, dumb longings. Pendants known as "lavaleers" hung from necks otherwise innocent of the costly fopperies of Versailles. Old ladies clad in princess dresses with yachting caps worn rakishly on their grey hair, vied with other old ladies in automobile bonnets, who, with opera glasses, searched out the meaning of every passing buoy. Young girls carrying "mesh-bags," that subtle connotation of the feminine character, extracted tooth-picks from them or searched for bits of chewing gum among their over scented treasures.

As it was an excursion, the *Fall of Rome* carried a band and booths laden with many delicious superfluities such as pop-corn and the misleading compound known as "salt-water taffy." There were, besides, the blue and red pennants that always go on excursions, and the yellow and pink fly-flappers that always come home from them; also there were stacks of whistle-whips and slender

canes with ivory heads with little holes pierced through. These canes were bought only by cynical young men whose new straw hats were fastened to their persons by thin black strings. Each young man, after purchasing an ivory-headed cane retired to privacy to squint through it undisturbed. Emerging from this privacy the young man would then confer with other young men. What these joyless young men saw when they squinted they never revealed. But among their elders they spread the strong impression that it was the Capital at Washington or Bunker Hill Monument.

Besides bottled soda and all soft drinks the *Fall of Rome* carried other stimuli in the shape of comic gentlemen — such beings, as, more or less depressed in their own proper environment, on excursions suddenly see themselves in their true light, irresistibly facetious. These funny gentlemen, mostly husbands, seated themselves near to large groups of indulgent women and kept up an exquisite banter directed at each other's personal defects, or upon the idiosyncrasies of any bachelor or spinster near. These funny gentlemen kept alluding to the excursion as the "Exertion." If the boat rolled a little they said, "Now, Mother, don't rock the boat."

"Here, girls, sit up close, we'll all go down together."

"Hold on to yer beau, Minnie. He'll fall overboard and where'll you git another?"

The peals of laughter at these sallies were unfailing. The crunch of peanuts was unfailing. The band, with a sort of plethoric indulgence, played slow waltzes in which the bass instruments frequently misapplied notes, but to the allure of which came youthful dancers lovely in proud awkward poses.

Mrs. Tuttle meanwhile was the social center, demonstrating that mysterious psychic force known as being the "life of the party." She advanced upon a tall sallow woman in mourning, challenging, "Now Mis' Mealer, why don't you just set and take a little comfort,

it won't cost you nothing? Ain't that your girl over there by the coffee fountain? I should ha' known her by the reesemblance to you; she's rill refined lookin'."

Mrs. Mealer, a tall, sallow widow with carefully maintained mourning visage, admitted that this was so. Refinement, she averred, was in the family, but she hinted at some obscure ailment which, while it made Emma refined, kept her "mizzable."

"I brought her along," sighed Mrs. Mealer, "tain't as if neither of us could take much pleasure into it, both of us being so deep in black fer her Popper, but the styles is bound to do her good. Emma is such a great hand for style."

"Yuess?" replied Mrs. Tuttle blandly. This lady in blue was not nearly so interested in Emma as in keeping a circle of admirers hanging around her cerulean presence, but even slightly encouraged, Mrs. Mealer warmed to her topic.

"Style?" she repeated impressively, "style? Seems like Emma couldn't never have enough of it. Where she got it I don't know. I wasn't never much for dress, and give her Popper coat and pants, twuz all *he* wanted. But Emma—ef you want to make her happy tie a bow onto suthin'."

Mrs. Tuttle nodded with ostentatious understanding. Rising, she seized Romeo's cage and placed it more conspicuously near her. She was critically watched by the older women. They viewed the thing with mingled feelings, one or two going so far as to murmur darkly. "Her and her parrot!"

Still, the lady's elegance and the known fact that she owned and operated her own automobile cast a spell over most of her observers, and many faces, as Mrs. Tuttle proceeded to draw out her pet, were screwed into watchful and ingratiating benevolence.

Romeo, a blasé bird with the air of having bitter memories, affected for a long time not to hear his mistress's blandishments. After looking contemptuously

into his seed-cup, he crept slowly around the sides of his cage, fixing a cynical eye upon all observers.

"How goes it, Romeo?" appealed Mrs. Tuttle. Making sounds supposed to be appreciated by birds, the lady put her feathered head down, suggesting, "Ah there, Romeo?"

"Rubberneck," returned Romeo sullenly. To show general scorn, the bird revolved on one claw round and round his swing; he looked dangerous, repeating, "Rubberneck."

At this an interested group gathered around Mrs. Tuttle, who, affable and indulgent, attempted by coaxings and flirtings of a fat bediamonded finger to show Romeo off, but the pampered bird saw further opportunity to offend.

"Rubberneck," screamed Romeo again. He ruffled up his neck feathers, repeating "Rubberneck, I'm cold as the deuce; what's the matter with Hannah; let 'em all go to grass."

Several of the youths with ivory-headed canes now forsook their contemplations to draw near, grinning, to the parrot-cage.

Stimulated by these youths, Romeo reeled off more ribald remarks, things that created a sudden chill among the passengers on the *Fall of Rome*. Mrs. Tinneray, looked upon as a leader, called up a shocked face and walked away; Mrs. Mealer after a faint "Excuse me," also abandoned the parrot-cage; and Mrs. Bean, a small stout woman with a brown false front, followed the large lady with blue spectacles and the tan linen duster. On some mysterious pretext of washing their hands, these two left the upper deck and sought the calm of the white and gold passenger saloon. Here they trod as in the very sanctities of luxury.

"These carpets is nice, ain't they?" remarked Mrs. Bean.

Then alluding to the scene they had just left: "Ain't it comical how she idolizes that there bird?"

Mrs. Tinneray sniffed. "And what she spends on him! 'Nitals on his seed-cup — and some says the cage itself is true gold."

Mrs. Bean, preparing to wash her hands, removed her black skirt and pinned a towel around her waist. "This here liquid soap is nice" — turning the faucets gingerly — "and don't the boat set good onto the water?" Then returning to the rich topic of Mrs. Tuttle and her pampered bird, "Where's she get all her money for her ottermobile and her gold cage?"

Mrs. Tinneray at an adjacent basin raised her head sharply, "You ain't heard about the Tuttle money? You don't know how Mabel Hutch that was, was hair to everything?"

Mrs. Bean confessed that she had not heard, but she made it evident that she thirsted for information. So the two ladies, exchanging remarks about sunburn and freckles, finished their hand-washing and proceeded to the dark-green plush seats of the saloon, where with appropriate looks of horror and incredulity Mrs. Bean listened to the story of the hairs to the Hutches' money.

"Mabel was the favorite; her Pa set great store by her. There was another sister — consumed — she should have been a hair, but she died. Then the youngest one, Hetty, she married my second cousin Hen Cronney — well it seemed like they hadn't nothing but bad luck and her Pa and Mabel sort of took against Hetty."

Mrs. Bean, herself chewing calculatingly, handed Mrs. Tinneray a bit of sugared calamus-root.

"Is your cousin Hen dark-complexioned like your folks?" she asked scientifically.

Mrs. Tinneray, narrowing both eyes, considered. "More auburn-inclined, I should say — he ain't rill smart, Hen ain't, he gets took with spells now and then, but I never held *that* against him."

"Uh-huh!" agreed Mrs. Bean sympathetically.

"Well, then, Mabel Hutch and her Popper took against poor little Hetty. Old man Hutch he died and

left everything to Mabel, and she never goes near her own sister!"

Mrs. Bean raised gray-cotton gloved hands signifying horror.

"St — st — st ——" she deplored. She searched in her reticule for more calamus-root. "He didn't leave her *nothing?*"

"No, ma'am! This one!" With a jerk of the head, Mrs. Tinneray indicated a dashing blue feather seen through a distant saloon window. "This one's got it all; hair to everything.

"And what did she do — married a traveling salesman and built a tony brick house. They never had no children, but when he was killed into a railway accident she trimmed up that parrot's cage with crape — and now," — Mrs. Tinneray with increasing solemnity chewed her calamus-root — "*now* she's been and bought one of them ottermobiles and runs it herself like you'd run your sewin'-machine, just as *shameless* —"

Both of the ladies glared condemnation at the distant blue feather.

Mrs. Tinneray continued, "Hetty Cronney's worth a dozen of her. When I think of that there bird goin' on this excursion and Hetty Cronney stayin' home because she's too poor, I get *nesty*, Mrs. Bean, yes, I do!"

"Don't your cousin Hetty live over to Chadwick's Harbor," inquired Mrs. Bean, "and don't this boat-ride stop there to take on more folks?"

Mrs. Tinneray, acknowledging that these things were so, uncorked a small bottle of cologne and poured a little of it on a handkerchief embroidered in black forget-me-nots. She handed the bottle to Mrs. Bean who took three polite sniffs and closed her eyes. The two ladies sat silent for a moment. They experienced a detachment of luxurious abandon filled with the poetry of the steamboat saloon. Psychically they were affected as by ecclesiasticism. The perfume of the cologne and the throb of the engines swept them with a sense of esthetic

reverie, the thrill of travel, and the atmosphere of elegance. Moreover, the story of the Hutch money and the Hutch hairs had in some undefined way affiliated the two. At last by tacit consent they rose, went out on deck and, holding their reticules tight, walked majestically up and down. When they passed Mrs. Tuttle's blue feathers and the gold parrot-cage they smiled meaningly and looked at each other.

As the *Fall of Rome* approached Chadwick's Landing more intimate groups formed. The air was mild, the sun warm and inviting, and the water an obvious and understandable blue. Some serious-minded excursionists sat well forward on their camp-stools discussing deep topics over half-skinned bananas.

"Give me the Vote," a lady in a purple raincoat was saying, "Give me the Vote and I undertake to close up every rum-hole in God's World."

A mild-mannered youth with no chin, upon hearing this, edged away. He went to the stern, looking down for a long time upon the white path of foam left in the wake of the *Fall of Rome* and taking a harmonica from his waistcoat pocket began to play, "Darling, I Am Growing Old." This tune, played with emotional throbbings managed by spasmodic movements of the hands over the sides of the mouth, seemed to convey anything but age to Miss Mealer, the girl who was so refined. She also sat alone in the stern, also staring down at the white water. As the wailings of the harmonica ceased, she put up a thin hand and furtively controlled some waving strands of hair. Suddenly with scarlet face the mild-mannered youth moved up his camp-stool to her side.

"They're talkin' about closing up the rum-holes." He indicated the group dominated by the lady in the purple raincoat. "They don't know what they're talking about. Some rum-holes is real refined and tasty, some of them have got gramophones you can hear for nothin'."

"Is that so?" responded the refined Miss Mealer.

She smoothed her gloves. She opened her "mesh" bag and took out an intensely perfumed handkerchief. The mild-mannered youth put his harmonica in his pocket and warmed to the topic.

"Many's the time I've set into a saloon listening to that Lady that sings high up — higher than any piano can go. I've set and listened till I didn't know where I was settin'— of course I had to buy a drink, you understand, or I couldn't 'a' set."

"And they call that *vice*," remarked Miss Mealer with languid criticism.

The mild-mannered youth looked at her gratefully. The light of reason and philosophy seemed to him to shine in her eyes.

"You've got a piano to your house," he said boldly, "can you — ahem — play classic pieces, can you play — ahem — 'Asleep on the Deep'?"

In another group where substantial sandwiches were being eaten, the main theme was religion and psychic phenomena with a strong leaning toward death-bed experiences.

"And then, my sister's mother-in-law, she set up, and she says, 'Where am I?' she says, like she was in a store or somethin', and she told how she seen all white before her eyes and all like gentlemen in high silk hats walkin' around."

There were sighs of comprehension, gasps of dolorous interest.

"The same with my Christopher!"

"Just like my aunt's step-sister afore she went!"

Mrs. Tuttle did not favor the grave character of these symposia.

With the assured manner peculiar to her, she swept into such circles bearing a round box of candy, upon which was tied a large bow of satin ribbon of a convivial shade of heliotrope. Opening this box she handed it about, commanding, "Help yourself."

At first it was considered refined to refuse. One or

two excursionists, awed by the superfluity of heliotrope ribbon, said feebly, "Don't rob yourself."

But Mrs. Tuttle met this restraint with practised raillery. "What you all afraid of? It ain't poisoned! I got more where this come from." She turned to the younger people. "Come one, come all! It's French-mixed."

Meanwhile Mrs. Bean and Mrs. Tinneray, still aloof and enigmatic, paced the deck. Mrs. Tuttle, blue feathers streaming, teetered on her high heels in their direction. Again she proffered the box. One of the cynical youths with the ivory-headed canes was following her, demanding that the parrot be fed a caramel. Once more the sky-blue figure bent over the ornate cage; then little Mrs. Bean looked at Mrs. Tinneray with a gesture of utter repudiation.

"Ain't she *terrible*?"

As the steamboat approached the wharf and the dwarf pines and yellow sand-banks of Chadwick's Landing, a whispered consultation between these two ladies resulted in one desperate attempt to probe the heart of Mabel Hutch that was. Drawing camp-stools up near the vicinity of the parrot's cage, they began with what might to a suspicious nature have seemed rather pointed speculation, to wonder who might or might not be at the wharf when the *Fall of Rome* got in.

Once more the bottle of cologne was produced and handkerchiefs genteelly dampened. Mrs. Bean, taking off her green glasses, polished them and held them up to the light, explaining, "This here sea air makes 'em all of a muck."

Suddenly she leaned over to Mrs. Tuttle with an air of sympathetic interest.

"I suppose — er — your sister Hetty'll be comin' on board when we get to Chadwick's Landing — her and her husband?"

Mrs. Tuttle fidgeted. She covered Romeo's cage with a curious arrangement like an altar-cloth on which gay

embroidered parrakeets of all colors were supposed to give Romeo, when lonely, a feeling of congenial companionship.

Mrs. Bean, thus evaded, screwed up her eyes tight, then opened them wide at Mrs. Tinneray, who sat rigid, her gaze riveted upon far-off horizons, humming between long sighs a favorite hymn. Finally, however, the last-named lady leaned past Mrs. Bean and touched Mrs. Tuttle's silken knee, volunteering,

"Your sister Hetty likes the water, I know. You remember them days, Mis' Tuttle, when we all went bathin' together down to old Chadwick's Harbor, afore they built the new wharf?"

Mrs. Tinneray continued reminiscently.

"You remember them old dresses we wore — no classy bathin'-suits then — but my — the mornings used to smell good! That path to the shore was all wild roses and we used to find blueberries in them woods. Us girls was always teasin' Hetty, her bathin'-dress was white muslin and when it was wet it stuck to her all over, she showed through — my, how we'd laugh, but yet for all," concluded Mrs. Tinneray sentimentally, "she looked lovely — just like a little wet angel."

Mrs. Tuttle carefully smoothed her blue mitts, observing nervously, "Funny how Mis' Tinneray could remember so far back."

"Is Hetty your sister by rights," suavely inquired Mrs. Bean, "or ony by your Pa's second marriage, as it were?"

The owner of the overestimated parrot roused herself.

"By rights," she admitted indifferently, "I don't see much of her — she married beneath her."

The tip of Mrs. Tinneray's nose, either from cologne inhalings or sunburn, grew suddenly scarlet. However she still regarded the far-off horizons and repeated the last stanza of her hymn, which stanza, sung with much quavering and sighing was a statement to the effect that Mrs. Tinneray would "cling to the old rugged cross."

Suddenly, however, she remarked to the surrounding Summer air,

"*Hen Cronney is my second cousin on the mother's side. Some thought he was pretty smart until troubles come and his wife was done out of her rights.*"

The shaft, carefully aimed, went straight into Mrs. Tuttle's blue bosom and stuck there. Her eyes, not overintelligent, turned once in her complacent face, then, with an air of grandiose detachment, she occupied herself with the ends of her sky-blue automobile veil.

"I'll have to fix this different," she remarked unconcernedly, "or else my waves'll come out. Well, I presume we'll soon be there. I better go down-stairs and primp up some." The high heels clattered away. Mrs. Bean fixed a long look of horror on Mrs. Tinneray, who silently turned her eyes up to heaven!

As the *Fall of Rome* churned its way up to the sunny wharf of Chadwick's Landing, the groups already on the excursion bristled with excitement. Children were prepared to meet indulgent grandparents, lovers their sweethearts, and married couples old school friends they had not seen for years. From time to time these admonished their offspring.

"Hypatia Smith, you're draggin' your pink sash, leave Mommer fix it. There now, don't you dare to set down, so Grammer can see you lookin' good."

"Lionel Jones, you throw that old pop-corn overboard. Do you want to eat it after you've had it on the floor?"

"Does your stomach hurt you, dear? Well, here, don't cry Mommer'll give you another cruller."

With much shouting of jocular advice from the male passengers the *Fall of Rome* was warped into Chadwick's Landing and the waiting groups came aboard. As they streamed on, bearing bundles and boxes and all the impedimenta of excursions, those already on board congregated on the after-deck to distinguish familiar faces. A few persons had come down to the landing merely to look upon the embarkation.

These, not going themselves on the excursion, maintained an air of benevolent superiority that could not conceal vivid curiosity. Among them, eagerly scanning the faces on deck was a very small thin woman clad in a gingham dress, on her head a battered straw hat of accentuated by-gone mode, and an empty provision-basket swinging on her arm. Mrs. Tinneray peering down on her through smoked glasses, suddenly started violently. "My sakes," she ejaculated, "my sakes," then as the dramatic significance of the thing gripped her, "My — my — my, ain't that *terrible*?"

Solemnly, with prunella portentousness, Mrs. Tinneray stole back of the other passengers leaning over the rail up to Mrs. Bean, who turned to her animatedly, exclaiming,

"They've got a new schoolhouse. I can just see the cupolo — there's some changes since I was here. They tell me there's a flag sidewalk in front of the Methodist church and that young Baxter the express agent has growed a mustache, and's got married."

Mrs. Tinneray did not answer. She laid a compelling hand on Mrs. Bean's shoulder and turned her so that she looked straight at the small group of home-stayers down on the wharf. She pointed a sepulchral finger,

"That there, in the brown with the basket, is Hetty Cronney, own sister to Mis' Josiah Tuttle."

Mrs. Bean clutched her reticule and leaned over the rail, gasping with interest.

"Ye don't say — that's her? My! My! My!"

In solemn silence the two regarded the little brown woman so unconscious of their gaze. By the piteous wizened face screwed up in the sunlight, by the faded hair, nut-cracker jaws, and hollow eyes they utterly condemned Mrs. Tuttle, who, blue feathers floating, was also absorbed in watching the stream of embarking excursionists.

Mrs. Tinneray, after a whispered consultation with

Mrs. Bean went up and nudged her; without ceremony she pointed;

"Your sister's down there on the wharf," she announced flatly, "come on over where we are and you can see her."

Frivolous Mrs. Tuttle turned and encountered a pair of eyes steely in their determination. Re-adjusting the gold cage more comfortably on its camp-stool and murmuring a blessing on the hooked-beak occupant, the azure lady tripped off in the wake of her flat-heeled friend.

Meanwhile Mr. Tinneray, standing well aft, was calling cheerfully down to the little figure on the wharf.

"Next Summer you must git your nerve up and come along. Excursions is all the rage nowadays. My wife's took in four a'ready."

But little Mrs. Cronney did not answer. Shading her eyes from the sun glare, she was establishing recognizance with her cerulean relative who, waving a careless blue-mitted hand, called down in girlish greeting,

"Heigho, Hetty, how's Cronney? Why ain't you to the excursion?"

The little woman on the wharf was seen to wince slightly. She shifted her brown basket to the other arm, ignoring the second question.

"Oh, Cronney's good — ony he's low-spirited — seems as tho he couldn't get no work."

"Same old crooked stick, hey?" Mrs. Tuttle called down facetiously.

Mrs. Bean and Mrs. Tinneray stole horrified glances at each other. One planted a cotton-gloved hand over an opening mouth. But little Mrs. Cronney, standing alone on the pier was equal to the occasion. She shook out a small and spotless handkerchief, blowing her nose with elegant deliberation before she replied,

"Well — I don't know as he needs to work *all* the time; Cronney is *peculiar*, you know, he's one of them that is high-toned and nifty about money — he ain't like *some*, clutching onto every penny!"

By degrees, other excursionists, leaning over the railing, began to catch at something spicy in the situation of these two sisters brought face to face. At Mrs. Cronney's sally, one of the funny men guffawed his approval. Groups of excursionists explained to each other that that lady down there, her on the wharf, in the brown, was own sister to Mrs. Josiah Tuttle!

The whistle of the *Fall of Rome* now sounded for all aboard. It was a dramatic moment, the possibilities of which suddenly gripped Mrs. Tinneray. She clasped her hands in effortless agony. This lady, as she afterward related to Mrs. Bean, felt mean! She could see in her mind's eye, she said, how it all looked to Hetty Cronney, the *Fall of Rome* with its opulent leisurely class of excursionists steaming away from her lonely little figure on the wharf; while Mabel Tuttle, selfish devourer of the Hutches' substance and hair to everything, would still be handing aroun' her boxes of French-mixed and talking baby talk to that there bird!

At the moment, Mrs. Tinneray's mind, dwelling upon the golden cage and its over-estimated occupant, became a mere boiling of savage desires. Suddenly the line of grim resolution hardened on her face. This look, one that the Tinneray children invariably connected with the switch hanging behind the kitchen door, Mr. Tinneray also knew well. Seeing it now, he hastened to his wife.

"What's the matter, Mother, seasick? Here I'll git you a lemon."

Mrs. Tinneray, jaw set, eyes rolling, was able to intimate that she needed no lemon, but she drew her husband mysteriously aside. She fixed him with a foreboding glare, she said it was a wonder the Lord didn't sink the boat! Then she rapidly sketched the tragedy — Mrs. Tuttle serene and pampered on the deck, and Hetty Cronney desolate on the wharf! She pronounced verdict.

"It's *terrible* — that's what it is!"

Mr. Tinneray with great sagacity said he'd like to show

Mabel Tuttle her place — then he nudged his wife and chuckled admiringly,

“But yet for all, Hetty’s got her tongue in her head yet — say, ain’t she the little stinger?”

Sotto voce Mr. Tinneray related to his spouse how Mabel Tuttle was bragging about her brick house and her shower-bath and her automobile and her hired girl, and how she’d druv herself and that there bird down to Boston and back.

“Hetty, she just stands there, just as easy, and hollers back that Cronney has bought a gramophone and how they sets by it day and night listening, and how it’s son and daughter to ’em. Then she calls up to Mabel Tuttle, ‘I should think you’d be afraid of meddlin’ with them ottermobiles, *your* time of life.’”

Mr. Tinneray choked over his own rendition of this audacity, but his wife sniffed hopelessly.

“*They* ain’t got no gramophone — *her*, with that face and hat? — Cronney don’t make nothing; they two could *live* on what that Blue Silk Quilt feeds that stinkin’ parrot.”

But Mr. Tinneray chuckled again, he seemed to be possessed with the humor of some delightful secret. Looking carefully around him and seeing every one absorbed in other things he leaned closer to his wife.

“She’s liable to lose that bird,” he whispered. “Them young fellers with the canes — they’re full of their devilment — well, they wanted I shouldn’t say nothing and I ain’t sayin’ nothing — only —”

Fat Mr. Tinneray, pale eyes rolling in merriment, pointed to the camp-stool where once the parrot’s cage had rested and where now no parrot-cage was to be seen.

“As fur as I can see,” he nudged his wife again, “that bird’s liable to get left ashore.”

For a moment Mrs. Tinneray received this news stolidly, then a look of comprehension flashed over her face. “What you talkin’ about, Henry?” she demanded. “Say, ain’t you never got grown up? Where’s Manda Bean?”

Having located Mrs. Bean, the two ladies indulged in a rapid whispered conversation. Upon certain revelations made by Mrs. Bean, Mrs. Tinneray turned and laid commands upon her husband.

"Look here," she said, "that what you told me is true — them young fellers —" she fixed Mr. Tinneray with blue-glassed significant eyes, adding *sotto voce*, "*You keep Mabel Tuttle busy.*"

Fat Mr. Tinneray, chuckling anew, withdrew to the after-rail where the azure lady still stood, chained as it were in a sort of stupor induced by the incisive thrusts of the forlorn little woman on the wharf. He joined in the conversation.

"So yer got a gramophone, hey," he called down kindly — "Say, that's nice, ain't it? — that's company fer you and Cronney." He appealed to Mrs. Tuttle in her supposed part of interested relative. "Keeps 'em from gettin' lonesome and all," he explained.

That lady looking a pointed unbelief, could not, with the other excursionists watching, but follow his lead.

"Why — er — ye-ess, that's rill nice," she agreed, with all the patronage of the wealthy relative.

Little Mrs. Cronney's eyes glittered. The steamboat hands had begun lifting the hawsers from the wharf piles and her time was short. She was not going to be pitied by the opulent persons on the excursion. Getting as it were into her stride, she took a bolder line of imagery.

"And the telephone," looking up at Mr. Tinneray. "I got friends in Quahawg Junction and Russell Center — we're talkin' sometimes till nine o'clock at night. I can pick up jelly receipts and dress-patterns just so easy."

But Mrs. Tuttle now looked open incredulity. She turned to such excursionists as stood by and registered emphatic denial. "Uh-huh?" she called down in apparent acceptance of these lurid statements, at the same time remarking baldly to Mr. Tinneray, who had placed himself at her side,

"*She* ain't got no telephone!"

At this moment something seemed to occur to little Mrs. Cronney. As she gave a parting defiant scrutiny to her opulent sister her black eyes snapped in hollow reminiscence and she called out,

"Say — how's your parrot? How's your beau — Ro-me-o?"

At this, understood to be a parting shot, the crowd strung along the rail of the *Fall of Rome* burst into an appreciative titter. Mrs. Tuttle, reddening, made no answer, but Mr. Tinneray, standing by and knowing what he knew, seized this opportunity to call down vociferously,

"Oh — he's good, Romeo is. But your sister's had him to the excursion and he's got just a little seasick comin' over. Mis' Tuttle, yer sister, is going to leave him with you, till she can come and take him home, by land, ye know, in her ottermobile — she's coming to git you too, fer a visit, ye know."

There was an effect almost as of panic on the *Fall of Rome*. Not only did the big whistle for "all aboard" blow, but some one's new hat went overboard and while every one crowded to one side to see it rescued, it was not discovered that Romeo's cage had disappeared! In the confusion of a band of desperadoes composed of the entire group of cynical young men with ivory-headed canes, seized upon an object covered with something like an altar-cloth and ran down the gangplank with it.

Going in a body to little Mrs. Cronney, these young men deposited a glittering burden, the gold parrot-cage with the green bird sitting within, in her surprised and gratified embrace. Like flashes these agile young men jumped back upon the deck of the *Fall of Rome* just before the space between wharf and deck became too wide to jump. Meanwhile on the upper deck, before the petrified Mrs. Tuttle could open her mouth, Mr. Tinneray shouted instructions,

"Your sister wants you should keep him," he roared,

"till she comes over to see you in her ottermobile — to — fetch — him — and — git — you — for — a — visit!"

Suddenly the entire crowd of excursionists on the after-deck of the *Fall of Rome* gave a rousing cheer. The gratified young men with the ivory-headed canes suddenly saw themselves of the age of chivalry and burst into ragtime rapture; the excursion, a mass of waving flags and hats and automobile veils, made enthusiastic adieu to one faded little figure on the wharf, who proud and happy gently waved back a gleaming parrot's cage!

It was Mr. Tinneray, dexterous in all such matters, that caught at a drooping cerulean form as it toppled over.

"I know'd she'd faint," the pale-eyed gentleman chuckled. He manfully held his burden until Mrs. Tinneray and Mrs. Bean relieved him. These ladies, practised in all smelling-bottle and cologne soothings, supplied also verbal comfort.

"Then young fellows," they explained to Mrs. Tuttle, "is full of their devilment and you can't never tell what they'll do next. But ain't it *lucky*, Mis' Tuttle, that it's your own sister has charge of that bird?"

When at last a pale and interesting lady in blue appeared feebly on deck, wiping away recurrent tears, she was received with the most perfect sympathy tempered with congratulations. There may have been a few winks and one or two nods of understanding which she did not see, but Mrs. Tuttle herself was petted and soothed like a queen of the realm, only, to her mind was brought a something of obligation — the eternal obligation of those who greatly possess — for every excursionist said,

"My, yes! No need to worry — your sister will take care of that bird like he was one of her own, and then you can go over in yer ottermobile to git him — and when you fetch him you can take her home with yer — fer a visit."